

The Issues of Catholic Sociology

J. ARTHUR O'CONNOR

Reprinted from the Dublin Review (London), January, 1934.

THERE are two main branches of Catholic sociology. One has to do with the social organism, the other with the economic life which feeds it and to some extent determines its form. In an article entitled "An Introduction to Catholic Sociology," published in this review in July, 1933, M. de la Bédoyère referred to the fact that the "organization of the economic world has reached such a degree of complexity, and in so doing has impinged at so many points on the other aspects of the life of the individual, that the latter (the only ultimate object of the Church's social concern) is trapped body and, too often, soul as well in a machinery which no one thought out, which no one properly understands, with which no one can do more than tinker," and pleaded rightly that the time had come for Catholic sociologists to "take an experimental plunge into the unknown, risking mistakes and ready to acknowledge them." But if the pioneers in this branch are to reap the full reward of their adventures, a preliminary or at least simultaneous work must be done in the other branch: the work of clearing away erroneous assumptions about the human factors of society and their connection with economic activities, and of determining what is and what is not consistent with the Christian concept of society. We are not mere analysts. Our work is positive and practical. We shall never reform the existing social order by deciding that this or that feature is not immoral. We have to determine whether or not each legitimate feature conduces to an intended whole, and to reject it if it does not. This is a point which many Catholic students have not seen. To apply the principles of Christian morals to the details of our complicated economic world without reference to the sort of society which the Christian religion envisages would be merely to accumulate a mass of pointless casuistic knowledge. What we need is not casuistry *ad infinitum*, but sociological decisions. It is

a waste of time to compile volumes of information about things which may have to be scrapped. The whole economic order, and every part of it, must be judged by the objective society at which social justice aims. Sociology can be Catholic only if it is teleological. Although modern society has not been made to an antecedent model, it is not a blind growth. Its evolution is the expression of a definite philosophy. But the Catholic Church, in addition to her philosophy, has in mind an exemplar of society built up from Our Lord's teaching about men's relations with each other in justice and charity. Her principles are indeed tests which lay bare the ethical composition of this or that detail, method, or feature, but they should be applied with the purpose of finding out what does and what does not make for a general end already in view. The sociological method in this matter is comparison; comparison between an actual human structure and a divine plan. The plan exists and can be consulted. It is in the keeping of the Catholic Church.

Before he can do what M. de la Bédoyère calls for, the Catholic sociologist has, therefore, to resolve a domestic difficulty. The first problem of Catholic sociology is within itself. It is created by some of the Church's own relations with the society which has grown up since the Reformation, and by the nature of certain social and economic evils. For a statement of it one cannot do better than go back to Mr. R. H. Tawney's "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism," where it is first set out in detail, and then summarized, in a style whose rhythm and play of antithesis are admirably suited to reasoned and illuminating exposition. A Catholic is tempted to quote Mr. Tawney extensively, not only for his understanding and scholarly temper, but for the joy of dwelling in good prose on ideas which our theological reviewers and writers of textbooks translate from the formal scholastic Latin into a hybrid English. The first and last chapters of "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" are particularly pertinent to the thesis of this paper. The author contrasts the social claims and concepts of the Church just before the Reformation with the place assigned to religion in the general life of England by the time of the Restoration, and gives, as the key to the change, the secularization of political, social, and economic philosophy owing to

the rise of a naturalistic science of society; "the general acceptance by thinkers of a scale of ethical values which turned the desire for pecuniary gain from a perilous if natural frailty into the idol of philosophers, and the main-spring of society"; and "the abdication of the Christian Churches from departments of economic conduct and social theory long claimed as their province." One may hesitate over the word "abdicate" as applied to the Catholic Church, but, although she was deposed, her long period of inactivity and acquiescence after she had recovered sufficient toleration to be able to speak in the name of social justice amounts to a virtual abdication. And it cannot be denied that the Church, even since her return to influence, has compromised in practice with the order which has resulted from the secularist philosophy, and, in trying to make it into a working scheme, has condoned the dualism which it involves. Therefore the most pressing work for the Catholic sociologist is to regenerate social and economic thought within the Church in Protestant and industrial countries, and to restore the Christian exemplar of common human life. He must clear away all those assumptions and values which she has adopted in many of her relations with modern society, not from choice but from expediency, and which she has been able to adopt because, although they are foreign to her spirit and philosophy, they are not immoral individually and in their essence. But toleration is not approval, and a moral negative is not a social positive. Prevented from doing the best job possible, the Church has tried to make the best of a bad job, and the danger has arisen that the result may be taken as satisfactory. Adjustments which have been necessary for her very existence in a hostile society, and for social discipline as well, have been regarded as precedents, and false inferences have been drawn from them. An internal problem has thus been created, and an attempt is made in this article to suggest the lines of solution.

If a thing is wrong as a whole, though right in parts, it must be condemned as a whole. If a thing is right, or at any rate not wrong, as a whole, though wrong in parts, it may not be condemned as a whole. It may be supported or at least tolerated. What matters is the philosophy which underlies it. In the second case wrongs can be righted within the system; in the first case the whole sys-

tem must be changed. No ambiguity is possible in the Church's relations with communism; she simply rejects it. But a great deal of ambiguity is possible in her relations with capitalism because she does not reject it as a whole. Let us be clear as to what we mean by capitalism. The name is given to two quite different things. Mr. Belloc and others use it to denote a society in which the bulk of land and capital is owned and controlled by a comparatively few people, whilst the rest have no such property, and are therefore proletarian. This is not the sense in which we use it here; and it is not the sense in which it is used in the great sociological encyclicals. It is not a definition of capitalism, but of the greatest evil of capitalism; perhaps of its chief characteristic in its present form. In itself, capitalism is that society in which (though some people provide both capital and labor themselves, whilst others may be laborers in one industry and capitalists in another, and others again, though manual workers, may own houses and land) capital is, as a working rule, provided and administered by one set of people and labor supplied by another. Both Leo XIII and Pius XI are emphatic that the capitalist system, with its method of payment by wages, is not wrong in itself; and still more emphatic that "the immense number of propertyless wage-earners on the one hand, and the superabundant riches of the fortunate few on the other, is an unanswerable argument that the earthly goods so abundantly produced in this age of industrialism are far from rightly distributed." On the same page on which these words occur, Pius XI uses language the trend of which is unmistakable, about the increase, along with the progress of machinery, of "the number of the dispossessed laboring masses," and about "the immense army of hired rural laborers . . . who have no hope of ever obtaining a share in the land," and who, "unless efficacious remedies be applied, will remain perpetually sunk in their proletarian condition." The distinction here made between the two things is unmistakable. Many students of Catholic sociology are at loggerheads because they have confused them. That capitalism has resulted in the deprivation of the mass of the people of property in land and industrial capital is a moral and social calamity, and may be fatal to the system; but it is not inherent in it. It is due to a number of historical, geographical, geological, and

sociological circumstances which, in combination, determined the form it has actually taken. The most immediate of these were the concentration of wealth which took place before the industrial age began, and the discovery of steam power. Let us consider this latter. Steam power is responsible for the concentration of Machinery in big factories, the consequent concentration of the ownership of industrial capital, and the concentration of masses of people in great towns. It is concentric by nature. The machinery which it drives has to be assembled around it, and the people who work the machines must be brought round the factories and workshops which contain them. So the factories grew round the engines, the slums round the factories, the shops around the slums, and the suburbs at a distance determined by the transport of the times. The formation of the modern industrial town was dictated by steam power. But if electrical power had been discovered first all this would have been unnecessary, as it is capable of wide diffusion. A totally different organization of industry would probably have resulted, in spite of other factors, with an ampler diffusion of capital and a population better spaced: in a word, a capitalist society different from the one which we know. Steam concentrated transport on to railways. Petrol and the internal combustion engine have distributed it once more over the roads, and have created a large number of owners and owner-drivers of motor vehicles and working proprietor-employers of motor garages and workshops. The railways no longer dictate industrial sites. A distribution is going on at the present time without any noticeable change in our general economy, but whether it is possible, now, to return to an equitable distribution of property on a large scale within the capitalist system, or whether such an attempt at redistribution will end in a new economic order, remains to be seen; but in theory, at least, it is not impossible. It could conceivably be done by a combination of Catholic philosophy and electricity. If Ireland is ever industrialized through the Shannon Scheme, it will be interesting to see whether she will copy, like Soviet Russia (its capital mistake and the measure of the futility of its philosophy), the structure of the steam age, or whether she will create by her own genius and her Catholic philosophy a new capitalist society, moulded by the distributive nature of electrical

power, and characterized by well-distributed industrial capital. Her peasants chose instinctively to acquire the land for themselves through Wyndham's Land Purchase scheme, rather than to hold it as tenants from the State; so that there is already a fairly equitable distribution of the ownership of land.

As far as Catholic sociology is concerned, the first problem of economic life is that of distributing equitably the wealth produced by capitalism. It is assumed that the bulk should go to those who provide and administer capital. Why? Is this assumption moral? Should a shareholder in a business receive a better remuneration than a workman who puts his health, strength, intelligence, and skill into it? And if so, why? Does every sort of risk merit a proportionate reward? What then are we to say of gambling and the risk to life in dangerous trades? The idea underlying the remuneration of loans and investments in most people's minds is money producing money and not money producing goods through land and labor. The endless inbreeding of money, reproducing productivity in the abstract, with the imperishability of a recurring decimal, whilst sooner or later all real productivity fails and all real products perish, is one of the reasons why the economic world is so potentially wonderful and so actually chaotic. It is one of the strongest arguments in favor of Dr. Ingram's contention that political economy should be fused in a complete science of society, and it will help towards the fulfilment of Mr. J. A. Hobson's prophecy that economics will, in course of time, become a group of studies pursued in the interest of social philosophy and subordinated to the wider study embracing the whole of human conduct. ("Wealth and Life," p. 137.) M. de la Bédoyère wants Catholic sociologists to apply to it the medieval doctrine of usury, but it would appear that at present, whilst not a few of our moralists are straining principles in order to adjust them to economic actualities and social convenience, there is a wide movement amongst non-Catholics of great authority in economics to correct anti-social economic processes by ethical principles. Mr. Hobson's chapter on "Economic and Ethical Values" is instructive on this subject, and, as he remarks, it is not without significance that the most advanced movement towards a recognition of the subordination of eco-

nomics to ethics should, in England, come from leading experts in that branch of economic study where the subject matter is most abstract, viz. finance.

The next step in our thesis sets us upon territory different from that which we have just traversed, but with similar features. Things which are materially and socially bad may be occasions of spiritual good to numerous individuals. They may not be evils in themselves at all. The Church's relations with such things are necessarily complex; and unless they are carefully studied they give rise to misunderstandings and confusion. The primary concern of the Church is the individual soul. She is interested in a man's social and economic circumstances only in so far as they affect his soul. Some of the most outstanding social evils are at the same time counsels of perfection and occasions of sin. Poverty, servitude, material degradation, repulsiveness, hunger, are amongst the most objectionable features of society and have dreadful moral consequences; yet voluntary poverty and entire obedience, humiliation and the mortification of the senses, are the technique of the Christian life. The poor not only have the gospel preached to them; they are imprisoned in a framework of its precepts and counsels. These things are susceptible of two conflicting sets of values. On the other hand, pride, avarice, luxury, cruelty, and oppression are sins, yet throughout history they have been associated with the governing classes, and therefore with social stability, which it is the Church's duty to support for the sake of the individual. To the oppressed she has often seemed to be on the side of sin. Besides, the exigencies of order, natural inequalities, and differences of merit and effort, as well as force, fraud, inheritance, and luck, produce unequal stations and standards of life. There are just as well as unjust inequalities. Thus we find the Church in liaison with, and often in apparent sympathy with, elements of the social order which are alien to her spirit, and which it is the duty of loyal Catholic sociologists to criticise. But all that she has done is to tolerate under diplomatic protest, so to speak, certain things which, though objectionable, can, by divine charity, be turned into instruments of salvation. The first thing, therefore, that the Catholic sociologist has to note is that the Church's association with any form of society in her essential work of saving souls

never compromises her or commits her to anything irrevocable. She may have been weak or wise. Her ministers are not supermen but men of their time, formed by the influences of their age, country and class. Besides, in all urgent undertakings there is first a phase of unreflective activity too direct and concentrated for critical notice of side issues. Reflection and criticism may follow and make amendments for future use. When we speak of the Church in this connection, we must keep in mind the distinction between the Church's considered judgment and deliberate policy, which direct the activities of her hierarchy, and the varying lines of action taken by her representative ministers in matters which are, as yet, open to opinion. These latter reflect all sorts of differences and interests. A West End priest of upper or middle-class birth and education will see almost everything quite differently from an East End priest of working-class birth and seminary education. Those Religious Orders which have adopted the English public-school system have a vested interest in great concentrations of wealth. Public schools and "exclusive" convents are impossible without such concentrations. The Church has to be all things to all men—a universality indeed; and whatever be her fundamental unity she must present an inexhaustible variety, from the priest-schoolmaster who will raise cultured eyebrows at the mention of social reform, to the apostolic but rough-and-ready curate who appears to think that good manners are a sign of doubtful orthodoxy.

Up to the time of Leo XIII the Church as such, though, of course, conscious of the shortcomings of our society, had given it no detailed or comprehensive critical attention, such as she had given, for instance, to Continental liberalism. The encyclical "*Rerum Novarum*" brought it for the first time to the bar of Catholic judgment. From that time onward no Catholic could be indifferent about it, or plead a dualism of religion and secular life. It was the rebirth of Catholic sociology. The present Pope has amplified Leo's teaching and applied it to the changes which have taken place over more than a generation. He reprimands those who have been indifferent or hostile to Leo's judgments. The Church has now reached the phase of criticism in her relations with the present social order, and has already cleared away many of the confusions and uncertainties which

her secondary relations with it had created. It is quite clear now that, whatever accidental alliances and compromises she may have made in the past, they will not be allowed to hamper her social work in the future. A writer in this review has pointed out recently that at the end of the struggle of the Reformation "the Church no longer protested against social injustice; it had become the ally of the ruling powers and the tool of vested interests," and that in our own time it has been regarded as "a servant of the established order." (Christopher Dawson, *Dublin Review*, January, 1933.) But it is abundantly clear that the Church is anxious to do practical justice now, and wants the help of all those who can unravel the intricacies and complications of the economical and financial processes which threaten to entangle her principles in their meshes. Two things especially stand out: that extreme wealth and power, and extreme poverty and dependence, involve injustice, and cannot be made moral by charity alone; and that there can be no dualism of moral and secular life. "For though economic science and moral discipline are guided each by its own principles in its own sphere, it is false that the two orders are so distinct and alien that the former in no way depends on the latter. The so-called laws of economics derived from the nature of earthly goods and from the qualities of the human body and soul, determine what aims are unattainable or attainable in economic matters, and what means are thereby necessary; whilst reason itself clearly deduces from the nature of things and from the individual and social character of man what is the end and object of the whole economic order assigned by God the Creator." ("The Social Order," p. 19.)

So far we have dealt with matters which have presented the Church with serious difficulties on account of their having a double character: now we come to defects for which there is no excuse; in which there has been no element of dilemma; which are the direct result of human respect and pandering to patronage; in which doctrine and practice are at variance. We will deal with three of them. They are: social values, the dignity of labor, and the relation between production and life.

(i) The Church has been content to concentrate on spiritual worth, and has been inclined to treat social dis-

criminations as secondary, and to accept them uncritically. But there are, as a consequence of Christian values, as well as from the nature of things, true and false social values, and unless true social values are established the spiritual values themselves are vitiated; and the opposition between her spiritual and social assessments forces on the Church the charges of insincerity and hypocrisy. For after all, social values are seals set by society upon individuals. The modern Church has been as lax in this respect as the early Church was strict; perhaps because she came to Roman society from outside, whilst modern paganism has grown up around her. An interesting comparison might be made between actual social and economic values. It is natural in our present society that, although they may not always coincide, they should be closely allied. In general, necessities are cheap, luxuries dear. Between necessity and luxury there are many degrees of utility. Utility is a very relative thing. It is true to say that, in many instances, things are valued highly in economic life according to their un-necessity (if the word may be permitted), and people in social life according to their inutility. It is assumed that people who can live without working are superior in quality to those who have to work for their living. "The old order changeth," and it is not so long ago that a nobleman who descended to trade was declassed. Nowadays tradesmen are ennobled. The argument which we are going to put forward is all the easier for the abdication of the old aristocracy, which constituted the governing class and recognized its duties to society. Nowadays wealth has taken the place of lineage, and assured wealth is the condition of permanent social elevation. But though people of wealth and leisure can be exceptionally useful members of society, if they have also character and attainments, that is not their title to superiority. Their title to that is that they can afford to be useless members of society. The general measure of the highest social superiority is merely distance from manual labor and even from professional work. And it cannot be denied that the Church has, in practice, endorsed these social estimates. There is no question here of real and necessary inequalities. We are speaking of something which bears no relation whatsoever to reality; of valuations which are purely arbitrary and reflect nothing but riches. They are part of our pagan in-

heritance. The transition from the old order to the new has been a revolution and is a sufficient answer to those who say that it is useless to try to change over from the present order to one based upon the real inequalities of gifts, character, effort, and function. Surely progress is not necessarily downwards. The psychological ground of such a change has been explored by Mr. Tawney in his book "Equality," of which the sections on Equality and Culture and the Old Problem in a New Guise are particularly relevant and commendable; and Mr. Hobson's rationalistic attempt to translate economic into human values is worthy of study. His proof of the social character of wealth, and the principle "From each according to his powers to each according to his needs," are perhaps the limit of the rationalistic reach. With one spark of illumination this present-day Saul might be turned into another Paul—an apostle of Christian truth.

(ii) The Church has always insisted on the dignity of labor, but she has countenanced a habit of estimating social values which leaves no room for such a thing. What have labor and dignity in common in the modern industrial world? It is taken for granted that manual labor not only assigns a man to an inferior social place but that it makes him really, humanly, inferior; that of its nature it coarsens, and in a sense degrades him; and that, though perfectly compatible with the higher culture of holiness, it is incompatible with secular culture. That this assumption is not true is capable of present demonstration and historical proof for which there is not space here. The fact is that no work necessary for human life lowers of itself, in any way whatsoever, those who perform it. What does that is the artificial social valuation set upon it. That valuation rests upon the assumption, not of the dignity, but of the indignity of labor. It is anti-Christian. Let it be said at once that inevitable natural inequalities, whether they spring from the nature of society and the necessity of order, or from innate individual qualities or merits, have very little to do with our social values. The unreality of these is demonstrated when they are brought up against education. To educate the working classes and to keep our present arbitrary social valuation of them is to create one of those elemental clashes which end in revolution. To give them culture and at the same time treat them as an inferior kind of humanity, different not

merely in social function and order, but in human quality as well, is to force them to break the mold in which our social order is cast. Universal education will certainly change most of our social values. At best they are part of our unchristened pagan inheritance; at the worst they are creations of our own snobbery. It is essential to Catholic sociology that the Church should be dissociated from them. She must translate the dignity of labor from a phrase in the language of cant into a fact in the practice of life.

(iii) What is the relation between production and life? The sociologist must be all the more insistent in pressing this question because the economist never thinks of it. Life and work minister to each other, of course; but which is the means and which the end? If the advantage of one has to be sacrificed to the advantage of the other which should be sacrificed? The answer of modern industrialist philosophy is simple and clear. It is this: For the few production is for life; for the many life is for production. There are two contrary *raison d'être*. That is the basic reason why capital and labor are always at enmity. It was the underlying assumption of slavery. It might be thought to be the essential moral flaw of capitalism, but that is not true, because the system is compatible with Christian partnership and is capable of paying ample living wages. Once more, this economic dualism is part of our unregenerate inheritance. It is taken for granted in all industrial disputes and social legislation that the employer produces to live, and the workman exists to produce, like a machine. Industrial awards and laws are framed accordingly. Wages are reckoned amongst the costs of production. For the rest, the working classes are the raw material for social experiments. Ever since the industrial system began the elementary decencies of the lives of millions have been sacrificed to the production of wealth for the enjoyment of a comparative few. Labor in conditions injurious to health and the employment of children and married women in certain industries have meant the sacrificing of young life, and of the production of life, to the production of wealth. And at last the working classes are being urged to practise contraception in order to limit their families to the purchasing power of their wages, the market demand for labor, and the size of the new houses. Even potential life has to be sacrificed to unnatural production.

In the article from which I quoted above M. de la Bédoyère said a profoundly true thing in a different connection. He spoke of "an economic world inheriting the ideas of an age of scarcity." That is, perhaps, the acutest criticism of our pitiful inability to rise to the material greatness which we have unconsciously created. We have even to reconstruct the age of scarcity from which we have never spiritually emerged, by destroying existing stocks of goods and restricting production, and by cutting population.

The gradual breakdown of the arrangement for using the masses for producing wealth for the few is having a sequel of curious interest to the sociologist. Certain safeguards have had to be devised against the effects of the workers' disabilities, and, though servile in character, they have put them in a position of privilege. In this country we have the anomaly of two distinct lines of legislation side by side, individualist for the rich, socialistic for the poor, corresponding to the two main divisions of society. But in a way the poor have the better of it: the moneylenders seem to be always safe, but employers and industrial magnates have to take their chances. On the other hand, when the poor are out of work they get unemployment pay. Their whole position is one of privilege. They are taught, doctored, insured, and pensioned at the expense of the community. They live in subsidized homes. Their position is quasi-servile, but it has a curious counter-effect; it engenders in them the mentality of the man of means or the remittance-man. Our society seems to be a vicious circle in which extremes always meet. Bad trade brings fewer terrors now to employees and more to employers. Economic fear has changed position. Capital and labor, which nature meant to be allies, will always be inimical to each other until the relations of life and production are rationalized by Christian philosophy; until the means and the end are the same for all men; until the production of wealth ministers equitably to the life of all and capital and labor pull in the same direction, instead of describing a parallelogram of divergent forces. Only then shall we see the end of the monstrosity of a socialistic capitalism, an individualism in which the vast majority have no individuality, and a society reputedly based upon private property in which the bulk of the people have no property at all.

In addition to Catholic philosophy and the Catholic ideal of the social order, the one effective means of rationalizing our society and securing concurrence in equitable inequalities is the diffusion of culture. Men seek or shun one another, cultivate or despise one another, according to their culture. It is culture, and not inequalities of function or wealth, which makes social classes. Every single inequality can be found within the same class. It is true that classes have their origin partly in differences of function and wealth, but only in so far as these offer different opportunities for acquiring culture. But in a society in which wealth was sanely distributed and functions sanely rewarded, a common culture, sufficient to make possible a common intercourse between all classes, would be a matter of course. Classes as we have them are degrees of civilization within society and are incompatible with the complete civilization of society. They are minor forms of the great division between civilization and barbarism. A country "is civilized in so far as its conduct is guided by a just appreciation of spiritual ends, in so far as it uses its material resources to promote the dignity and refinement of the individual human beings who compose it." ("Equality," p. 103.)

It is indicative either of lethargy or of timidity amongst Catholics in England, due perhaps to their being a small and unpopular minority, that the Catholic will find in the works of non-Catholics like Graham Wallas, J. L. and Barbara Hammond, R. H. Tawney, and even J. A. Hobson, and others (although he will disagree with many of their opinions—especially Hobson's) more material for a Catholic sociology than in those of all but one or two Catholics writing today, in spite of the lead given by Leo XIII and Pius XI. The task before us is staggering, and it will need not only courage but hard thinking and close application as well. It can be done only by the joint efforts of a very large number of workers. Each must remember for his own encouragement that, though separate, he is not one man against a fortress, and that a whole force is converging unseen upon the objective. Ours is a smaller but similar task to that of the early Church. But the early Church started with one advantage over us: it had not to reform itself. It won in the Roman Empire by living its own teaching fearlessly, and that very living produced its Fathers, Doctors, and Saints.

Communism and Complacency

RUTH KATHERINE BYRNS

Reprinted from The Catholic World (New York), June, 1933.

GRIM women with rundown shoes and discouraged men with muscles getting soft for want of work listened to the young Communist leader as she harangued the crowd to unite against the capitalists who were driving them into poverty, slavery, and starvation. There was a murmur of agreement when she shouted, "Why should your children starve while the children of the rich eat the best in the land and ride around in limousines?"

Another night it was a boy just out of high school who spoke with stirring oratory to a group of unemployed, typical Americans in a city park. He won applause when he asked, "Why should you go without butter where there is butter to spare? Why should you hunger for bread where there is too much flour? Why should you need meat in a country where the farmers are raising more stock than they can sell?"

A former college student, aglow with the fever that fosters revolution, spoke with nervous enthusiasm many evenings last summer in a middle west city. Gathered around him every evening were groups of disheartened men who greeted his words with nods and sighs. "The capitalist system has failed," he argued. "Look at the stock market! Look at the factories no longer running! Look at the banks! Look at the bankruptcies!"

During the winter the boy's influence spread to larger cities where the field for discontent and radical thought was kept fertile by despair, worry, hunger, and need. Last week the newspapers carried the story of a hunger march, organized and led by this young leader. Over 15,000 men and women followed the Communist through city streets and waved red flags in the faces of mildly curious spectators.

These audacious young Communists are but three of the many who are discussing their theories wherever they can get a listener—in college dormitories, on village streets, around the camp fires of the hobo jungles, and in the living

rooms of the *litterati*. We who are Catholics believe that the fundamental theories of those who spread the doctrines of a Godless Communism are wrong, but we must admit that many of the things they say are grounded in fact and truth. Should it be Communism to ask why thousands of children must go hungry in a land where there is food to spare? Should it be radical to rebel at the sight of millions of men pacing the streets month in and month out, seeking in vain for work and honest wages? Is it revolutionary to ask how long we can expect a country to continue if it is based on a balance of poverty and luxury, want and wealth, pauperism and corruption?

Such questions are communistic, radical, or revolutionary simply because those who are asking them are Communists or radicals. The present period of economic distress has been seized by these propagandists as the best material from which to make arguments and because so many of their charges and complaints are justified, there is real danger that the influence of these false leaders will continue to increase. A critical listener can easily say that the young Communists offer little of practical theory and plans—only a well-worded attack on conditions that exist. The citizen with a home and an income may well ask how the Communists would better conditions, but the men and women who have little but despair and discouragement may think that their lot would hardly be worse under a new régime.

The great danger in the whole situation is that while the Communist is suggesting his thin shell of theory as a basis for the inevitable readjustments and changes that the future will bring, the men and women who might offer the firm foundations of Christian ethics, moral philosophy, and Catholic principles are keeping in the background. Though Communism would mean the upheaval of all that is happiness and security to the American, and especially to the Catholic, he lets it gain ground before his very eyes and placidly ignores it.

If there was ever a time ripe for the spread and practice of Christian principles, it is the present. The terrible results of a progress that is predominantly materialistic are so glaring that no one can deny them. The unfortunate effects of corruption, dishonesty, and injustice are so conspicuous that none can fail to see them. At every turn we confront

evidence that demonstrates what society must expect when the moral law is forgotten—murder, kidnaping, organized vice, robbery, and perjury. Now, when the results of non-Christian behavior are so deeply felt, is the most opportune time to present the sound, reasonable, Christian standards for living. Today, when suffering men and women are eagerly looking for a solution to the problems of society and for a philosophy that brings peace to the soul in a world where comfort is insecure, should certainly be the time when Catholics, confident in their faith, would make bold to speak. But it is the Communist, and not the Christian, who is at hand at every strike, in any open meeting, in the groups of the weary who wait at relief stations and employment offices, and at every strategic spot with his futile and unsatisfying doctrine. While Christian charity is furnishing the food and clothing for thousands of unfortunates, it is Communist theory that is fed to their minds; while Christian spirited men and women are attempting to appease the misery of the poverty-stricken, the Communist propagandists are painting vain pictures of a social system where misery would not be present.

Those who oppose Communism often excuse their failure to show their colors by saying that it is better to let the movement run its course unmolested and ignored. They point to the collapse of the Ku-Klux Klan as evidence that such organizations need not be fought but retreat by their own lack of direction. This argument, however, is not a valid one, for the Ku-Klux Klan and similar societies appealed only to ignorance, prejudice, and intolerance while the Godless Communism protests against economic evils that actually do exist and appeals not to a man's prejudices but to his hope for a more satisfactory social system. Much as we dislike and distrust Communism we should recognize it as a positive philosophy of life with a definite goal. To dismiss it as a movement of no consequence is to fail to see a real antagonist who may or may not prove to be a strong enemy.

To attempt to suppress Communist propaganda would doubtlessly prove an unwise move. The persistent belief in free speech is a sentimental delusion of the American people to which it is easy to make an appeal. If the Communist were not allowed to preach his doctrine he would become a

martyr even in the opinions of those who opposed his theories. If the tenets of Communism were enhanced by a whispered secrecy they would take on a glamour and fascination which would supersede reason in the minds of many. The germs of this false belief would develop and spread more quickly in the darkness of suppression than in the open light of reason. The influence of Communism can be curtailed most effectively not by suppression but by the substitution of a stronger force—Christianity.

If the apathetic citizen were to bestir himself and look for a means to prevent the growth of Communism, he could find a wise suggestion in these words of Orestes A. Brownson: "Rightly to comprehend a system is not simply to detect its errors. We understand not even an erroneous system till we understand its truth; and its real refutation lies not so much in detecting and exposing its fallacies as in detecting, distinguishing, and accepting the truth which it misapprehends, misinterprets, and misapplies. . . . If we wish to produce a favorable effect on them and to refute their system for their sake, we must begin, not by denouncing their error, but by showing them that we recognize and accept their truth."

To defeat the Communist we must begin by recognizing that there is widespread injustice, mad greed, inexcusable incongruities, and unscrupulous selfishness in our present system. We must admit that there is reason to disapprove of a society that does not question the expenditure of hundreds of dollars for decorations at a debutante ball in a city where thousands of children are hungry. We must acknowledge that there is a lack of balance in a country that houses its sweat-shop workers in tenement houses and its movie stars in Hollywood mansions. We must agree that the jobless man with a family to provide for has a right to just anger when he reads of the seven-year-old New York girl whose guardian listed the minimum cost of maintaining her for one year at forty-five thousand, six hundred dollars. We must realize that there is a real and terrible problem at hand in a nation where over two hundred thousand boys under twenty-one—half a million of tomorrow's voters—are despondently wandering from town to town, unable to find a niche in our social structure. In other words, we must acknowledge the faults of our contemporary social system and

we must know that either widespread reform or devastating revolt is inevitable.

If every Catholic were possessed of a determination to transmit the essentials of his Church's doctrines, a readiness to apply Christian principles to every problem that arises, and a desire to interpret every phase of life in terms of the Catholic code, a campaign for reform would be well begun. But the ordinary American layman contents himself with much less than this. He wishes to preserve and strengthen his personal sanctity but he usually lacks the missionary spirit. He is hesitant about quoting the teaching of Christ to help determine a policy of state or of business. Because we have been subjected to bitter prejudice, Catholic laymen, for the most part, seem timid about offering the truths of their faith.

Consider the young Communist again: he is always aggressive. He is not afraid of criticism, disagreement, or disapproval and he offers his ideas freely even when he knows they are not being sought. He is thoroughly interested in vital, significant, and real matters. Apparently he is deeply concerned with what he considers the welfare of society and, on the surface (however he might ultimately prove himself to be, were he in power) he is unselfish and desirous of bettering the worldly conditions of mankind at large. He is serious and he tries to relate everything about him to his central theme of living—the Communist state. For these qualities of character—courage, independence, and seriousness—the young Communist must be admired in spite of our disagreement with his theories and our disapproval of his standards.

Just as the opponent of Communism must accept as his strongest weapon and turn to his own uses what there is true in Communism, so, too, he must make use of those tactics which the Communists have found effective. In other words, because the Communist is everywhere preaching his atheistic doctrine, the Christian can best defeat him by a more vigorous and widespread teaching of the truths of the Church.

But the substantial Catholic citizen continues to ignore the Communist and the revolutionary forces that threaten him and his Church. He drifts along on the assurance that because his is the true Church he need not be concerned

about protecting it. He thinks that by professing Christianity himself he is doing enough. He might well look at Russia, at Spain, or at Mexico for warning, but he says, with too much assurance, that "America is different."

Repeatedly the warning is sounded by His Holiness, Pope Pius XI, that Christian civilization is in danger throughout the world. The American layman fails to heed the warning. He continues to think of atheism as the mild hobby of a few cranks and Communism as an extravagant theory of an insignificant group of radicals.

It is reasonable to think that men become sincere Communists only because to them this philosophical and political system seems to be more true and good than other systems. No person of intelligence and honesty would join the Communistic movement if he thought that it was based on a false and bad theory. It is likewise reasonable to think that if an alternative with more truth and more goodness were suggested as frequently and as forcibly as is Communism, it would be accepted. That is, sincere men will grasp Communism because they have not been taught, in the words of Pope Pius XI, "... a radical cure and remedy, namely, sound and solid principles, charity and justice and fundamental indestructible truths and teachings of the value of souls and the dignity of the human individual, man's origin and destiny and his essential relations with God, his creator and redeemer and lord and judge, and with his fellow men in the rest of creation."

If Communism grows, the fault lies not with those who having a little truth think it is all but with those who recognize the real truth of Christ but in a short-sighted complacency fail to transmit it to all who will listen.